

THE HERO OF OUR HEROIC AGE



A SKETCH OF COLONEL WILLIAM PEPPERRELL



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By IVORY FRANKLIN FRISBEE

*When a great man dies
For years beyond our ken,
The light he leaves behind him lies
Upon the paths of men.*

— LONGFELLOW

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Dedicated

To the Honorable Senators of Maine,

Eugene Hale and
William P. Frye

*whose lives represent the nobility of her
founders*

I N T R O D U C T I O N

“THE Hero of Our Heroic Age” was written for the Pepperrell Association, of Kittery, Me., at its assembly in 1898. Its purpose is to present, in a brief, comprehensive sketch, the life of Col. William Pepperrell, the founder of the Pepperrell family in America. By repeated solicitation it is given to the public in its present form. To the original address, however, have been added certain incidents relating particularly to his advent to Kittery. Thus, while giving to the descendants of Col. William Pepperrell renewed interest, it will arouse in others, it is believed, a fuller appreciation of one of the most unique characters of our colonial history, and, in view of the projection of his influence through his own deeds, and those of his son, Sir William, inspire a deeper reverence for the name of Pepperrell, which, in our early history, stands second only to that of Washington.

IVORY FRANKLIN FRISBEE,

Lewiston, Me.

June, 1900

“That things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs.”



COL. WILLIAM PEPPERRELL was born at Tavistock, Devonshire, England, 1646. His family was of ancient and illustrious lineage, and after centuries of vigor, still preserves its name in the annals of his province. This, while noted in itself for its richness and beauty of scenery, lies in the midst of the most distinguished locality of England.

The little district, washed by the Bristol and English channels, not only had long been known for its commerce, agriculture, and manufactures, but also famed for its mental energy and spiritual vigor. The ocean in all ages has been a potent means of civilization. But from these shores, for over a century and a half, had sailed those great English expeditions for the exploration and ownership of the New World. From these waters the bold Cabot had put to sea, hence Drake had circumnavigated the globe, and from these ports Raleigh, Smith, Popham, Gilbert, and Gorges had projected the colonization of America. Thus, with the reawakening of the world, the mental activity of this people, far above all England, had become intensely aroused.

And so from the coast of Cornwall and Devonshire, which are nearer to Maine than is any other part of England, for over half a century after the ascendancy of Charles I., flowed

to her coast a steady stream of immigration, bringing hither men of wealth and valor, with the arts of life, and the foremost progressive spirit of the British Isles. Vessels constantly plied between Dartmouth, Plymouth, Falmouth, and the ports on the Bristol Channel and the Piscataqua, Isles of Shoals, and the Merrimac. So close, indeed, it is said, was the communication between the people of these districts that their families were scarcely broken. These rock-bound and storm-lashed shores of Maine and New Hampshire seemed to them, in truth, like those of their sea-girt isle. So to these lands they affixed the same names that had designated the towns, cities, and scenes that they had left; and, as we would expect, the social life of these towns, too, represented the miniature of old England, save that the prim amenities, hospitality, and the sumptuary religious rites of their old homes received, under the spirit of liberty which continually pervaded their new, a more liberal bias and a loftier aim.

To such a people came William Pepperrell, not, however, as an adventurer seeking to replenish his prodigal purse with nuggets of gold, nor as a fugitive from the religious strife of the Old World. The premature death of his father, and the financial reverses that subsequently befell his family, had left him, early in life, with only the chief blessing which the ancients believed that the gods vouchsafe to man, the aspirations of a noble ancestry. Full of the spirit of his province he sought to rebuild his fortune in the New World; and thus his achievements here, by their own heroic vigor, through the vista of over two centuries, glow still as a beacon light.

His first visits to Maine were upon certain fishing expeditions which were then being sent out to these shores and to the Banks of Newfoundland. While employed in these he foresaw the superior advantages that the former offered his business and the latent possibilities of this country. Accordingly he soon abandoned the sea, and, with a Mr. Gibbins, went into the business of curing fish upon the Isles of Shoals, whose rugged cliffs, then teeming with busy life, seemed not bleak and inhospitable to the new comer.

At Kittery Point, Maine, lived Mr. John Bray, from whose warehouse Pepperrell was wont to refit his vessels and replenish his stores, and, perchance, to anchor his craft more fre-



PEPPERRELL'S COVE FROM THE TOMB LOT.



THE PEPPERRELL CHURCH.

quently in the cove, which centuries after should perpetuate his name, that he might catch a glimpse of the shipwright's beautiful daughter, Margery. After four or five years' residence at the Isles of Shoals he and Gibbins dissolved partnership, each agreeing to settle on the eastern or western coast as lot should determine. But Pepperrell's lot was evolved, undoubtedly, through the magic of the fair maiden, for he next appears settled at Kittery Point suing for her hand.

Mr. Bray was of ancient lineage and of that band of pilgrims who had left Plymouth, England, in the early and uncertain days of the Restoration. While yet holding rich estates in the Old World, he was rapidly accumulating others in the New. And the suit of Pepperrell, owing to his slender fortune, was not readily favored by the lord of the estates.

But:

“What if a hundred years ago those close-shut lips had answered No,
When forth the tremulous question came that cost the maiden her Norman name,
And under the folds that looked so still
The bodice swelled with her bosom's thrill?
Should I be I or would it be
One tenth another, to nine tenths me?”

Soft is the breath of a maiden's Yes,
Not the light gossamer stirs with less;
But never a cable that holds so fast
Thro' all the battle of wave and blast,
And never an echo of speech or song
That lives in the babbling air so long!
There were tones in the voice that whispered then
You may hear to-day in a hundred men.”

Soon, however, by a series of fortunate ventures, he won also the father's heart. The Bray house, which was old even then, stands still as the most ancient monument in Maine of

colonial times, and its sunny parlor, the witness of the simple marriage rites of William Pepperrell and Margery Bray, is preserved to-day intact, with its quaint windows, wide fire-place, and antique paneling and wainscoting. Close at hand, on a site granted by his father-in-law, Pepperrell built his mansion, which now marks the scene of the founding of the Pepperrell family in America.

This marriage of William and Margery teemed with great events. Through a partnership with the shipwright and merchant, Bray, Pepperrell was given at once an ample sphere for his splendid abilities. But a richer fortune inhered in his wife. She exemplified at once the Greek and Christian ideal of beauty, and her high spiritual intuition became to his vigorous qualities a sixth sense, which enthused ever his efforts with the highest purpose. Through this marriage the old mansion with its stately gables, now a forgotten relic of a glorious past, was to become a nursery of heroes, the centre of wealth and culture, the favorite resort of the clergy, statesmen, governors, and of strategic councils. To them a son was to be born who, while sharing the honors of state with his father, should be courted by the most fashionable and select society of the colonies.

He, indeed, with a conqueror's might was to become "A John the Baptist of the Revolution." It was he who should, in truth, prepare America for the establishment of Protestantism. From the blood of Pepperrell a new race, which Holmes calls the "Brahman Cast of New England," should spring to build and rule a mighty Nation.

When William Pepperrell had begun his career at Kittery Point, along his wharves, through his warehouses, and in the public gatherings of his town, he early manifested in a large degree that business energy, pluck, inventive genius, and breadth of spiritual vision that had characterized his boyhood home. Soon his firm led in all the colonies. It extended its operations to Saco and Portland, sent yearly over a hundred vessels, manned by the hardy sons of Kittery, to the Grand Banks, others on trading expeditions to the southern ports of the colonies and of the West Indies, or on foreign voyages to the European markets. As his son, William, came into the firm, although owning already the greater part of his own village,



MARGERY BRAY PEPPERELL.

and all of Saco, he bought large tracts of land in most of the other townships, from Kittery to Portland, so that, it is said, he could ride thither on his own estate. Largely through his business energy Kittery grew more rapidly than did any other town in Maine. Indeed, during his greatest activity it paid over one half of the taxes of the State, and his warehouses and counting room became the coveted commercial college for the sons of the most worthy families. To enter here, under the firm of Pepperrell and son, the Sparhawks, the Vaughns, the Frosts, the Chaunceys, and the Wentworths, whose names have no superior in colonial history, deemed it a high privilege and an honor. At his death his name had become throughout the colonies the synonym of pluck and business push, and his firm represented the richest fortune in North America. The firm of Pepperrell and Son was, in fact, to the New World what the Rothschilds are to-day to the Old. It not only paid large taxes to the State, but made possible by its financial support every expedition against the foe from Port Royal to Louisburg, for whose equipment alone the junior Pepperrell furnished over five thousand pounds.

Yet this vast estate was accumulated and preserved amid the greatest dangers, hardships, and vicissitudes of Colonial times. Maine in those days was the frontier, the bulwark of the rest of the colonies. Her territory on the north was almost constantly traversed by marauding hordes of French and Indians, and on the south invested by pirates. Young Pepperrell had hardly entered upon his business at Kittery Point when a malignant savage war broke out and continued for nearly half a century with unabated fury. Life then seemed almost a daily struggle for existence. There was no standing army, but every man was a soldier. Pepperrell in taking the lead in the defences of his town built, at his own expense, Fort Pepperrell, near the site where Fort McClary now stands. Of this he had command and also of the militia at the Point, but later as Lieutenant Colonel he had under his command the militia of Maine. His men worked at the yards and docks, while wary sentinels guarded the hilltops, or while others from the fort ranged the outposts in search of the savage foe. His fields were the muster ground for the western towns of the province where, in almost daily drill, the soldiers were trained under his hand, not only for the tricks of the savage, but also for the strategy of the French. Although

Kittery, on account of her numerous creeks and rivers, was naturally more exposed to the attacks of the Indians than were the neighboring towns, yet by the vigilance of Pepperrell it suffered less than they. Through his courage, energy, and military ability in the face of a combined savage and skilled strategic force, the light of his colony was ever kept burning.

Pepperrell also was engaged largely in shaping the judicial affairs of his town and province. Amid his great business cares and military duties, he was justice of the peace for thirty-five years, and in 1715 was appointed judge of the Court of Common Pleas. Although Maine became a province of Massachusetts, yet she always held her domestic and civil relations intact. Hence, while the quaint penalties of the times for breaking the common law were here enforced, the theocratic code of Massachusetts Bay and of Plymouth never found a hearing. Before Pepperrell the right of any man to worship God as his conscience dictated was never questioned. Before him neither German nor Dutchman, neither Catholic nor Quaker was ever indicted for his religious belief. His clear, unclouded sense of justice revolted alike at the atrocities committed in the name of piety by Philip II., and those committed in the name of a Jewish theocracy by Winthrop, Cotton, and Mather. Untrammelled by any form of mediæval superstition, he strove always to establish liberty of life and freedom of conscience.

Pepperrell, too, exerted a great influence in the political interests of the province. Mingling freely with his fellow townsmen he was their constant adviser, and champion of their rights and privileges. In all of this work, by his position in business, in military and judicial affairs, he was a commanding power, and, in 1696, he became the people's representative in the general court of Massachusetts. In Maine from the time of Gorges, every person before the law had the right to participate in the government under which he was born, irrespective of property, education, religion, color, or previous condition. Her provincial government was of two bodies, which her people tenaciously maintained through all of her history, and which became the model for the form of legislation throughout the states and Nation. In maintaining these principles Pepperrell acted far in advance of his time. Then the idea of the inalienable rights of men had gained but little attention. It had not found lodgment in the mind even of Roger Williams, for



THE PEPPERRELL MANSION.



his form of government, like that of Plymouth and of Massachusetts Bay, was a theocracy. Indeed, this was the cardinal principle of the revolution. Aye, not until after the Civil War, with all its sacrifice of treasure, men, and blood, did it become, by the fifteenth amendment, fully engrafted into our Constitution; and even now, in many quarters, this right is not a fact as it was under the influence of Pepperrell. Lest injustice may thus seem to be done Massachusetts in her Colonial days, it is to be remembered that her attitude toward Maine, although her province, was wholly mercenary. The one purpose of Massachusetts was to establish a Jewish theocracy. Although deriding Maine as her enemy for receiving refugees from her persecution, she aided her in driving the Indians as far as possible from her own borders. Thus, says Chamberlain, the brunt of the century of Indian wars fell upon Maine. She was the frontier and flying buttress of New England, her soil the battle-ground and her sons the vanguard. Although this aid was of undoubted advantage to Maine, and although there is due Massachusetts a deep debt of gratitude for her great and substantial services in all of our subsequent history, still no one wishes to ignore the intolerance of her colonies in banishing Roger Williams, in persecuting the Quakers, and in executing the so-called witches. So, on the other hand, in studying the character of Pepperrell, we must note that Maine, notwithstanding the uncertainty of maintaining her government amid the hard conditions of the New World, the rivalry of sects, the malignity of the French, and savagery of the Indians, put, as the first principle of her civil polity the inalienable right of the franchise.

Pepperrell was no bigot. His energies were always exerted for the highest social and moral welfare of the people. Although living in a time when slavery and bond service were common in the other colonies, he never imported the one nor employed the other. He solved both the slavery and labor questions before they began. While he was liberal to the poor, he knew that the only way to develop a self-respecting, independent yeomanry was to help them develop themselves. His great fortune, therefore, was acquired by stimulating free labor and enterprise among his fellow citizens, and it was largely due to this policy that Kittery, as we have seen, for a long period paid over half the taxes of the State. It was true, however, that Pepperrell had one or

two household slaves. But these were often retained to relieve the town of their support, and in Maine they could not be set free until they had become fitted by their masters to care for themselves. Yet Pepperrell at his death gave freedom to his slaves, anticipating the father of our country nearly seventy years, and John Brown one hundred and thirty. His democratic spirit is further shown in the rearing of his family. This, consisting of two sons and six daughters, he educated according to his station. He furnished them not only with the public education of the time, but, through a Harvard tutor, Rev. John Newmarch, with many of the graces and arts of culture. His daughters, indeed, foreshadowed the new woman, whom our industrial civilization has brought so prominently to the front. They were educated with their brothers and like them, inheriting their father's energy and business tact, made many a venture of trade in his ships sailing to the European markets.

Yet there was something in Pepperrell's life above mere money getting, loftier than military glory, or judicial fame, and nobler than æsthetic culture. Enthused, as we have seen, by the great Protestant thinkers of England, freed from the vagaries and superstitions of his time, gifted with a many-minded brain, he was most responsive to the finer culture of the Christian religion. Nor was this chastening, purifying, ennobling influence with him a mere sentiment. In his daily walks with men he was both charitable and helpful. His hand was open to the needy, and his home an example of Christian hospitality. Amid all the cares of business, of court, of politics, and of an almost constant savage warfare, his great purpose, encouraged by his exemplary Christian wife, was to establish, above all the vicissitudes of the strife of bigots, a State where man should be aided by all of his environment of birth, of education, of social, of political, and of religious influence, to rise into the full fruition of his spiritual being. We have spoken of his New Testament-like spirit toward the Catholic, the Papist, and the inly-lighted Quaker. But the old church, which he founded, and of which, while he lived, he was a pillar, is to-day the greatest proof of his highest and most enduring labors.

As the weight of years approached, he laid his burden more and more upon his son, whom now he beheld enjoying the highest position in the gift of the people. Thus at the age



THE BRAY HOUSE.



FORT MC CLARY, NEAR SITE OF FORT PEPPERRELL.

of eighty-seven, in his home, which he had reared as a model of taste and refinement, looking out upon the ocean which was filled with his stately ships, honored and esteemed by his fellow citizens, surrounded by his cultured and amiable family, rejoicing in the proud honor of his son, satisfied with the measure of work that he had accomplished for humanity, and filled with the hope of a glorious immortality, his great spirit took its departure as the sun sinks below the rich autumnal glow of the western horizon.

If, in these days, when our resources, manufactures, and commerce have been developed and the laws and facilities of trade have become established, Pepperrell had accumulated his great fortune, he would stand among the most sagacious business men of our time. But he created his wealth from what? From the primeval forest, from the untilled and unfurrowed soil, from the trackless sea, untraced by chart and unilluminated by the beacon light, while harassed on the one hand by the contentions of hostile factions for the control of the State, and on the other, by the constant dread of the savage foe.

If against these, in revengeful attacks, he had led his soldiers, his name in honor of his bravery would have been emblazoned on the brightest page of our barbaric history. But such was his skill as an executive officer, in defending his town, that although more vulnerable than others, it suffered less than any other town in Maine.

If he had been a resident of a rich and populous state instead of the province of Maine, and as judge had carried out the barbaric code of his time, although his acts would be condoned by posterity, he would have been canonized in our ancestor-worshipping history as possessing a rare judicial mind. But in an unsettled country, amid new and conflicting cases of civil and property relations, by adjusting them according to the higher light of reason and Christianity, he projected our whole American jurisprudence.

If he had been instrumental by torture, persecutions, and murder in denying to all but church members the right of franchise, the freedom of speech, and the pursuit of life, liberty, and happiness, he would have had, undoubtedly, ere this, a monument erected perpetuating his deeds in the cause of humanity. But in the face of Cotton and Mather, in fact,

against the combined influences of the New and Old Englands that were opposed to all true liberty of conscience and the pursuit of happiness, not only by his own hand did he keep burning constantly the light of liberty, but, also, by his voice and deeds, the spirit of true worship as an undimmed taper pointing ever toward the heavens.

Such deeds are circumscribed by no biography. Through their influence upon mankind they make the annals of true history. In the formation and maintenance of states, two forms of human greatness appear. The one, seeing the objective relations of affairs, subserves the interests and receives the honor of contemporaries, and fills with illustrious names the pages of the so-called contemporary histories. The other, beholding the actual relations of material and spiritual entities, creates new forces, invents labor-saving machines, brings under control the powers of nature, steam, water, and electricity, discovers new continents, and creates epochs in the progress of the race. Men of the latter type live in advance of their times and await their just recognition and appreciation until posterity shall have arrived at their status of thought and action.

Of such men was Col. William Pepperrell. His pluck and indomitable energy stimulated trade throughout every colony of America. His wealth, as we have seen, in equipping armies in the expeditions against the savage foe, Port Royal, Quebec, and Louisburg, was a bulwark of defence to the whole country.

Moreover, he trained many of these men for their prowess and success in battle. Nearly the whole force, with their commanding officers, engaged in the siege of Louisburg was from Maine, and nearly one third of Sir William's own regiment was from Kittery, who, with the leader himself, had been directly under the command and drill of the elder Pepperrell. The great victory at Louisburg was not achieved, as jealous partisans would have us believe, by luck, but by the bravery and skill of veterans, who for twenty years in training and conflict in the field, had been inured and equipped for every form of hardship and danger, led by a general, who in training and military genius, outranged not only the military acumen of the New, but also of the Old World.



SIR WILLIAM PETERRELL.
FROM THE PAINTING IN THE ESSEX INSTITUTE, SALEM, MASS.

These achievements, in which the elder Pepperrell had such a part, opened the way for the establishment of American liberty on this continent. They kept constantly in the field a body of trained and skillful men. They gave those northern soldiers confidence in their own ability to dare defend their rights, so that the fall of Louisburg, the Dunkirk of America, was the beginning of a tidal wave that at Quebec swept the power of the French from this land, and at Yorktown planted on this soil the inalienable rights of men forever.

Thus the principles of Pepperrell, which in his town and State were established as a fact, long before the puritan colonies dreamed of them, became the conquering principles in founding our government. The men of Kittery, again and again, had fought for these rights in defending their firesides. Again and again in public assembly they had decreed that they would defend them in behalf of the colonies with their lives, if need be, years before a musket had been fired at Lexington, or ever the hand of Jefferson with a pen of diamond had written them in our Constitution.

As his life has been felt in our civil polity, so it has been a vital factor in our mental and spiritual progress. He wrote no chronicles of events, but, in the defence of his town and State, he was preparing the battle-ground on which the nation, in the accomplishment of his principles, should make history. He hampered his times with no theological treatise, or religious persecutions, for his life was not of creeds and dogmas, but rose above the highest spiritual life of his time into the clear blue ether of the twentieth century. In no mediæval hallucination did he attempt any literature, but through his efforts in establishing the American idea of rights of men, he struck the key note of all literature on this continent.

Not only has he given us the spirit of our literature, but his life has been potent in its creation. The scenes of which he was so great a part have given many a theme for orator, novelist, and poet. Thus the land of Pepperrell has inspired the pens of Holmes, Whittier, Longfellow, Hawthorne, and Lowell.

Happy are we that the life of Pepperrell is not shrouded in the gloom of myth and fable, thrice happy that his life, illustrated by facts, far surpasses the glory of the most richly wrought

characters of classic lore. Jason with his loyal band from the court of the gods in search of the golden fleece, was the modern Spaniard in search of gold along the Spanish main. Achilles, Agamemnon, and Menelaus were sackers of cities. Æneas, embodying the consummate wisdom of the ancient world, founded a state whose watchword was self-aggrandizement. It remained for the heroes, alone of all the world's history, who planted the first colonies on the coast of Maine, men like Popham and Gorges, to found a state which, in its civil, political, and spiritual relations, has cherished ever the highest aspirations of mankind. Yet among all these heroes, founders of a new nation, who endured the hardships and dangers of a stern and stormbound coast, in fertility of business accomplishments, in public spirit, and in majesty of life, Col. William Pepperrell has no peer. Aye, who is there among us to-day whose energies are constantly taxed in transmuting vast products of raw material into populous towns and cities, that in military executive ability, in ripeness of judicial spirit, in breadth of statesmanship, and in magnanimous philanthropy can with him compare !

Indeed, as projected by the life of this man, the destiny of our republic thus far wrought out is but rudely sketched. Our immense material progress, our multiplied mechanical inventions, our utilization of steam and electricity in manufacture and mobilization, our advancement in agriculture and commerce, in the arts and applied sciences, are but the expansion of his work in the accumulation of his fortune. We have by the fifteenth amendment granted the right of franchise to all, irrespective of color and previous condition, but the complete actuality of this law is yet to be achieved. In the extension of the public school and in the foundation of colleges and churches we have exemplified the higher ministration of wealth. But in the competition for money great bodies of men are still in slavery to selfish capital, great masses in our cities, great areas in our rural districts are still in ignorance ; and although churches have been multiplied and literature cheapened and disseminated, yet only now and then the seer appears who lives in the unbiased freedom of the will. Although the multiplied forms of mechanical inventions, and the consequent progress in manufactures, in agriculture, in transportation, and in mobilization have, by reducing the hours of toil, more than doubled our lifetime, yet, while we



THE PEPPERRELL TOMB.

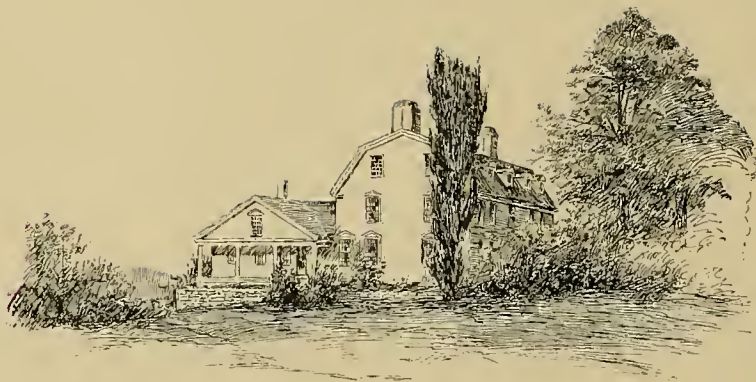
are thus permitted, as never before, to live as the gods, we for the most part spend still our leisure in aimless rapid amusements.

The nineteenth century has been indeed a rag-picking, money-gathering age, but it has laid the material foundation for the intellectual and spiritual development of the twentieth. In this, men will come to know the true ministration of wealth, the rich opportunities of leisure, and the highest purposes in life. In this, through the educational, philanthropic, and spiritual agencies which have already begun to be established, American labor is to be elevated, the intellectual and moral faculties of the popular mind quickened and developed, its social feelings warmed, and all of its energies directed into higher channels. Then the mass of mind, which unhallowed capital now enslaves and poverty buries, shall have been brought into righteous actuality. Then every man and every child in America, through the loving care of our fatherland, shall have been elevated into social equality, and each in the possession of his individual rights shall bow in adoration to Him who hath thus far preserved us a Nation.

This work, descendants of Pepperrell, the life of your sire enjoins upon you. The outward growth of a nation may be compared to the growth of a coral reef which, over the dead bodies of numberless animalcules, rears its crest above the stormy billows, until at length it rejoices in the light of a brighter clime, in rich verdure, the wide-spreading palm tree, and the populous city. But the true grandeur of a nation is evolved always through the purpose and influence of its founders. As the soul is the essential element in a human organism, so the spirit of the founder, finding expression more and more in the lives of posterity is to be still, through you, the essential element in the development of the Nation.

When, by succeeding ages, time shall have filled out our prospective destiny, and the elements wrought in its completion shall have been justly weighed, when the British and American races, in federal alliance for the spiritual elevation of the race, shall have looked back to the origin of their new birth, of the Brahman race of the world, the scribe of history will retrace its rise to the land of the Pepperrells. And unnumbered hosts of bold yeomanry, statesmen, novelists, and poets, in annual pilgrimages to the shrine of our hero, shall bear ever a fresh perpetual inspiration from his life in the motto of our grand commonwealth, *Dirigo*, I clear the way.

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THE SPARHAWK HOUSE, KITTERY, MAINE.

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